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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001471

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#) [BURMA](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: EAP DAS JOHN'S MEETING WITH MFA PERMSEC KRIT

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (b)

1. (C) SUMMARY: During a March 8 meeting with MFA Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn, EAP DAS Eric John countered the perception that the U.S. was not sufficiently engaged in Southeast Asia. Krit indicated that a 505 Agreement on Excess Defense Articles could be concluded prior to March 15. He observed that the current political situation in Thailand is unique in Thai history. Krit described Indonesian and Malaysian attempts to engage with Burma and suggested continued coordination on Burma between ASEAN members, the U.S., and other regional powers. END SUMMARY

2. (C) On March 8 EAP DAS Eric John, accompanied by the Ambassador, met over lunch with Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn. Krit was accompanied by Director General of American Affairs Nongnuth Phetcharatana and East Asian Director General Nopadol Gunavibool.

THE IMAGE OF THE U.S. IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

3. (C) DAS John -- noting recent suggestions from Singapore and elsewhere that the U.S. was not fully engaged in the region -- highlighted the upcoming visit of Secretary Rice, which would be followed by the President's visit in November for APEC, as evidence of positive and dynamic U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia. The re-emergence of China is not a zero sum game for the U.S. Krit agreed, however, he cautioned that the U.S. image in the region had suffered because the U.S. appeared to only discuss Southeast Asia in a negative context, citing the Human Rights Report and Burma as examples. He indicated that a positive message from the Secretary during her visit would resonate.

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505 AGREEMENT

4. (C) The Ambassador asked about the status of our request that Thailand modify an existing agreement to allow the continued transfer of Excess Defense Articles (EDA) to the Thai military (505 Agreement), which needed to be concluded by March 15 in order to allow the handing over of EDA helicopters to the Thai Army. Krit said the agreement had been held up by an ongoing bureaucratic struggle between MFA, Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Cabinet over whether agreements such as this required Cabinet consultation. MFA was waiting for Cabinet notification before proceeding with the diplomatic note approving the agreement. Krit suggested that, although he favored approaching the cabinet on this issue, he would consider releasing a diplomatic note if MOD sent MFA a letter formally requesting it do so. Such a letter would provide MFA with the political cover it needed to issue the diplomatic note approving the agreement.

CURRENT POLITICAL TURMOIL

5. (C) Krit described the current political situation as unique in Thai history. He highlighted the restraint of the police and military and the overall lack of violence as symbols of Thailand's political maturity. "In the old days it would have been resolved by now because people would have come to blows." Thaksin had not anticipated that the sale of Shin Corp. would create such a backlash since in his mind the deal was only a business transaction. Despite the appearance of impropriety the opposition had not been able to make any of their charges stick and notwithstanding the protests in Bangkok the Prime Minister still was very popular in the countryside.

BURMA: MULTI-NATIONAL COORDINATION

6. (C) Krit agreed that under President Yudhoyono, Indonesia was on the way to re-assuming its "rightful and positive" leadership position in ASEAN. Yudhoyono's February visit to Burma had gone well because he had the credibility

to deliver a message to the junta about the need for change.

17. (C) Krit said that Foreign Minister Kantathi was working hard to facilitate a visit by Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid to Burma to meet with the regime leadership. However, the RTG had had very limited contact with the SPDC over the last few months. Krit noted that even military-to-military contact had not been taking place recently. The Burmese were using the move to Pyinmana as an excuse to avoid meeting with FM Hamid. The Ambassador said that FM Hamid should not agree to go to Burma without permission to visit Aung San Suu Kyi. Krit believed that the Burmese would not allow a Hamid visit if seeing ASSK was a precondition. He suggested such a request be handled in a more "ASEAN" manner because dealing with the Burmese publicly only caused a defensive reaction. While a tougher stance towards the junta had strengthened ASEAN to a degree, it had failed to produce results. Krit encouraged continued high-level U.S. engagement with India and China over Burma, agreeing that common language among the major powers was beneficial.

18. (U) DAS John did not have the opportunity to clear this message.
BOYCE